

## Creativity gap to be studied

Dan R. Goddard EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

**Publication Date** : November 12, 2003

Rackspace Managed Hosting, a high-tech San Antonio firm, has added about 110 jobs this year and still has 25 openings that it hopes to fill with "young creatives."

But unlike Austin, San Antonio doesn't exactly have a hip reputation - making it hard to attract well-educated young people - and it needs to cultivate its coolness, or it could miss out on what author Richard Florida calls "the **creative economy**."

Lew Moorman, a Rackspace vice president, will talk about the importance of art and culture in attracting the newly emerging **creative** class as part of "Finding Ways: A Conference on Art, Culture and Economic Development in San Antonio," which takes place today at the Convention Center.

"I was born here and I think San Antonio is a pretty unique place, but we need to come up with ways of attracting more young, educated, ambitious people," Moorman said. "While I think it's a good place for young people, we don't yet have a critical mass."

"We need to create ways for young people to become integrated into the local community. A lot of my employees say they have a hard time fitting in here. First Friday has become a way for people to get involved, and we need more activities like it. You have to really search for it and be proactive if you want to be part of what's cool in San Antonio."

Florida, author of the best-selling "The Rise of the **Creative** Class," will be the keynote speaker at the all-day conference being sponsored by the Office of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Economic Development. It's the kickoff to a two-year process to come up with a community plan, being referred to as the Cultural Collaborative, for the city's **creative economy**.

Florida's Web site, creativeclass.org, ranks San Antonio 34 among 49 large U.S. cities according to its "creativity index." The creativity index scores cities on such factors as **creative** class, high tech, innovation and diversity.

San Antonio ranks 84 in the percentage of the **creative** class as part of the general population. It ranks 34 for high tech, 126 for innovation (based on the number of patents per capita) and 66 in diversity, popularly known as the "gay index." Florida said his research indicates that cities with a large gay population have a tolerance for alternative lifestyles - a key to attracting young creatives.

Among Texas cities, Austin, Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth all rank in the Top 10.

"In recent history, the number of people doing **creative** work has exploded," Florida wrote in the March issue of Washington Monthly. "Those in **creative** occupations - from engineers and designers to artists and writers to high-end planners, analysts, managers and other '**creative** professionals' - now comprise more than 30 percent of the workforce, up from about 10 percent in 1900 and only 20 percent as recently as 1980."

Florida sees a major and growing division between old **economy** manufacturing and service jobs and the new **creative economy** that includes high-tech, entertainment, journalism, finance, high-end manufacturing and the arts. Florida says the **creative economy** rewards constant innovation, the product of human creativity.

"Look at Austin and what Michael Dell has done for that city with a business he started in his dorm room," Moorman said. "San Antonio has a lot of things that creatives find attractive - the Hill Country, lakes and other outdoor activities as well as galleries, live music clubs and restaurants - just like Austin. But we need to find ways to market this to smart young people across the country."

Laura Braden of the Office of Cultural Affairs said the conference is likely to focus on issues such as building a **creative** work force through art education; boosting cultural tourism; attracting, retaining and growing new businesses; and arts as a catalyst for urban revitalization. Arts leaders are facing challenges such as exhausted funding sources, inadequate facilities, undercapitalized nonprofit organizations, lack of communication and a need for better marketing.

"The city is only just beginning to recognize the potential the arts have to be an economic motivator," Braden said.

Jon Hinojosa, executive director of SAY Si, said it's going to be hard to build a **creative** class when so many of the city's schools have cut back drastically on art education.

"When I was growing up, every elementary school had an art teacher," Hinojosa said. "But right now, SAISD has 47 elementary schools and just one art teacher. I don't think schools are out to get the arts; it's more a case of benign neglect. The schools are having to make a lot of hard choices in this **economy**, and art is always easy to cut.

"I don't think people realize the long-range effect. If we want to have a well-educated workforce, if we want to have patrons for the symphony and the museums, if we want well-informed board members and patrons, then art education is crucial. Study after study has tied art education to better student performance - but it takes long-term commitment to make it happen."

George Cisneros of Urban-15 said he was somewhat skeptical about what actions might result from a community plan, but at least the conference will get business and community leaders thinking about the economic impact of the arts.

"I've heard Florida talk at a lot of conferences over the years and he's good in places that already have strong support for the arts," Cisneros said. "You see the better side of the art community when you hear him talk. But San Antonio is different, and his ideas will have to be adapted to what we have to work with. I do think it's good to focus more on the arts and economic development, rather than only talking about cultural tourism."

dgoddard@express-news.net